BACKLINKO

ON-PAGE SEO

CHECKLIST

I probably don't need to tell you that on-page SEO is HUGE.

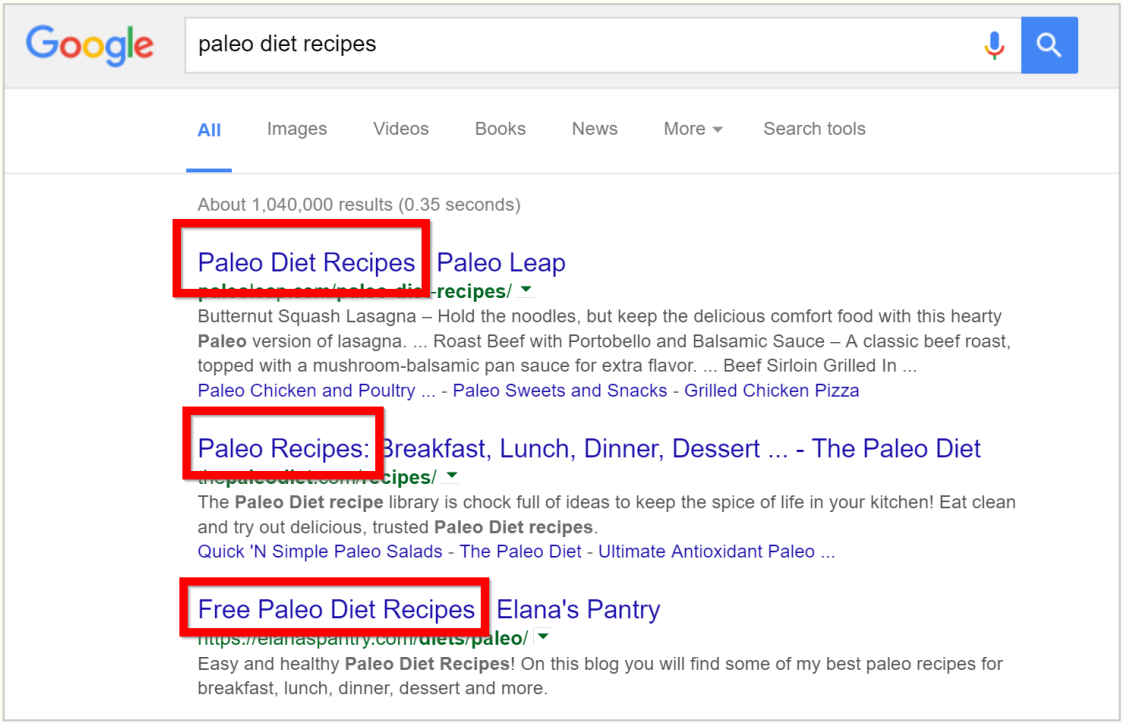
Sure, backlinks are still Google's #1 ranking signal. But to actually rank for your target keywords, your on-page SEO needs to be on point.

Here's a checklist that you can use to make sure every page on your site is optimized.

1 ☐ FRONT-LOAD YOUR TITLE TAG

Google puts more weight on words found **in the beginning** of your title tag.

You can see this in action by searching for competitive keywords in Google:


Google
paleo diet recipes
All
Images
Videos
Books
News
More
Search tools
About 1,040,000 results (0.35 seconds)
Paleo Diet Recipes | Paleo Leap
Butternut Squash Lasagna – Hold the noodles, but keep the delicious comfort food with this hearty Paleo version of lasagna. ... Roast Beef with Portobello and Balsamic Sauce – A classic beef roast, topped with a mushroom-balsamic pan sauce for extra flavor. ... Beef Sirloin Grilled In ...
Paleo Chicken and Poultry ... - Paleo Sweets and Snacks - Grilled Chicken Pizza
Paleo Recipes: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Dessert ... - The Paleo Diet
The Paleo Diet recipe library is chock full of ideas to keep the spice of life in your kitchen! Eat clean and try out delicious, trusted Paleo Diet recipes.
Quick 'N Simple Paleo Salads - The Paleo Diet - Ultimate Antioxidant Paleo ...
Free Paleo Diet Recipes | Elana's Pantry
Easy and healthy Paleo Diet Recipes! On this blog you will find some of my best paleo recipes for breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert and more.

As you can see, most pages that rank for competitive keywords strategically place their keywords in beginning of their title tag.

For example, let's say you wanted to rank for the keyword "weight loss tips" and you had two headlines to choose from:

Headline #1: Weight Loss Tips: 10 Strategies for Shedding Pounds
Or
Headline #2: How to Drop 10 Pounds With These Weight Loss Tips

Google would see the first headline as MORE about the topic of "weight loss tips" than the second one.

Why?

Because the keyword is in the beginning of the title tag.

So you'd want to go with headline #1.

ACTION STEP: Include your target keyword in the beginning of your title tag.

2 ☐ SEO-FRIENDLY URLS

I see a lot of people creating 50+ character URLs, like this:

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/ConsumerHealthCare/A-Guide-to-Understanding-Clinical-Trials_UCM_426055_Article.jsp

(That's an actual URL)

Even if your URLs aren't as long as this one, it might be a good time to revisit your URL structure.

Why does your URL matter for SEO?

Just like your title tag and content, Google uses your URL as a clue to help them figure out the topic of your page.

And the easier you make that process for them, the more confident they'll be about ranking your page for your target keyword.

How can you make it easy for them?

Create short and sweet URLs that include your target keyword.

If you have a date or category in your URL structure (like: http://example.com/category/2014/5/12/title-of-your-post), consider cutting out the category and date from future posts.

After a lot of testing I've found that super-short, keyword-rich URLs make a small but significant difference in rankings.

ACTION STEP: Use short and sweet URLs that include your target keyword.

3 ☐ USE MULTIMEDIA IN BLOG POSTS

Adding multimedia – like images, screenshots, lists and videos – doesn't have a *direct* effect on your page's rankings.

But I included it here because it boosts user-interaction signals that Google is paying more and more attention to (more on that later).

Multimedia also increases the perceived value of your content.
Higher perceived value=more links=higher rankings.

ACTION STEP: Include at least 1 multimedia type (video, audio, images and lists) in every blog post that you publish.

4 ☐ USE OUTBOUND LINKS

Google wants to see you as an active member of the web.

If you rarely link out to other resources – or nofollow all of your outbound links—it looks like you're hoarding PageRank for yourself.

ACTION STEP: Include at least 2 outbound links to related authority sites (popular blogs, news sites and .edu and .gov resources) in every piece of content that you publish.

5 ☐ INCLUDE YOUR KEYWORD IN THE BEGINNING OF YOUR POST

Keyword prominence is the new keyword density.

In other words, Google pays close attention to WHERE a keyword appears on your page. The earlier it appears, Google's thinking goes, the more important it must be.

Think about it like this:

Let's say you were writing an article about office furniture.

Wouldn't it be weird if you used the words "office furniture" for the first time… in the last sentence of the article?

Well it's the same idea. It looks weird NOT to mention your keyword early in your article.

ACTION STEP: Include your target keyword in the first 100 words of your article.

6 ☐ WRAP YOUR TARGET KEYWORD (OR A SYNONYM) IN AN H1 TAG

Your H1 tag is like your page's subheadline.

Most blog platforms (like Wordpress) automatically wrap your blog post title in an H1 tag.

However, certain themes override this setting and cause your page to have no H1 tag at all.

You can easily check this on your site by looking at your page's source code and searching for your article's title. If it's in an H1 like this, you're set:

ACTION STEP: Make sure your keyword or synonym is in an H1 tag.

7 ☐ NAIL LOADING SPEED

This is HUGE.

Page Speed is one of the few ranking signals that Google has publicly confirmed. It's that important.

You can easily evaluate and improve your site's loading speed using Google's own PageSpeed Insights tool.

ACTION STEP: Use the Google PageSpeed Insights tool to figure out your site's loading speed. Wordpress plugins WP Rocket and WP Smush It can help speed things up.

8 ☐ ADD MODIFIERS TO YOUR TITLE TAG

This is a great trick to wrangle in those super long tail searchers.

These 5-9 word searches may not show up in the Google Keyword Planner, but people DO search for them.

While it doesn't make sense to optimize around these keywords (after all, they're unpredictable), you can rank for them by including modifiers in your title.

ACTION STEP: Add modifiers like "2019", "best", "guide", and "review" to help you rank for long tail versions of your target keyword.

9 ☐ USE PROMINENT SOCIAL SHARING BUTTONS

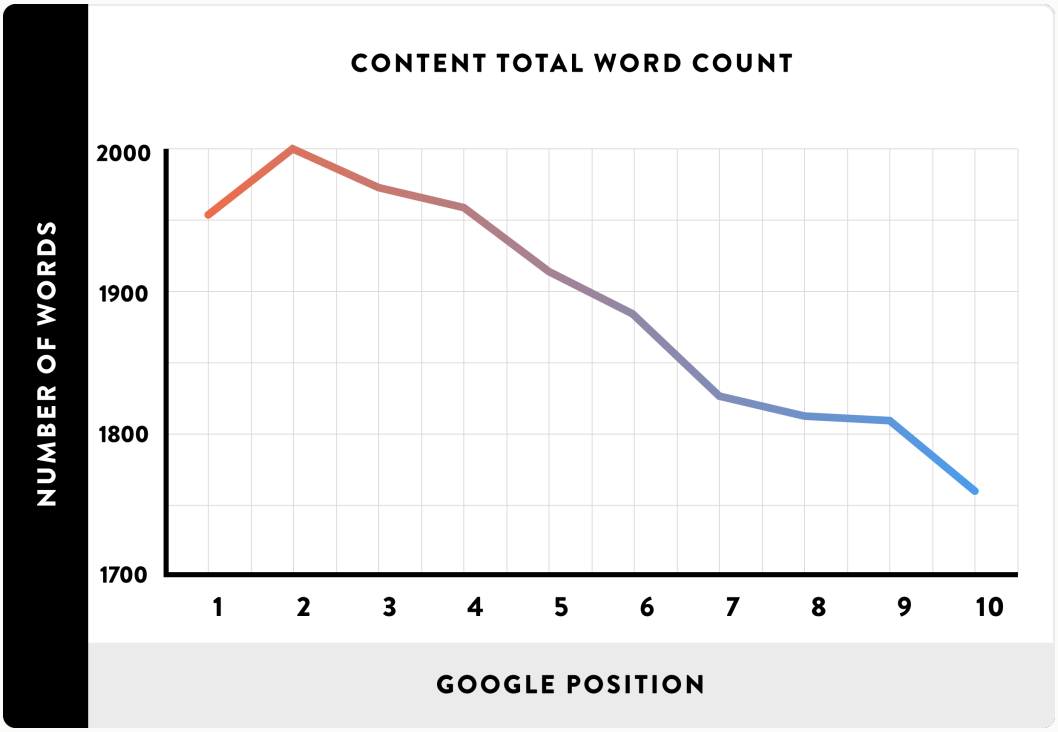
The easier you make it for people to share your article, the more likely they are to share it.

Make sure your social sharing buttons are prominently displayed on blog posts and articles. I actually make it so my share buttons follow you down the page.

ACTION STEP: Make sure your social sharing buttons are front and center on blog posts and articles.

10 ☐ PUBLISH LONG CONTENT

Several industry studies (like this one) have shown that longer content ranks significantly higher in Google:



As you can see, the top 10 results have an average of approximately 1800 words.

ACTION STEP: Write at least 1500 words for content that you're trying to rank for competitive keywords.

11 ☐ SLASH BOUNCE RATE

Bounce rate is an SEO and conversion killer. That's why it's a metric that I pay VERY close attention to.

If Google sees people bouncing from your page in the search results, it's a clear sign that you're not a quality result for their users. And they'll quickly drop you from the first page.

Adding internal links to the beginning of your content is one of the fastest ways to decrease your bounce rate.

When people first land a page they're more "click happy" than when they're deeper in an article. That's why internal links at the beginning of your articles tend to get clicked more often… slashing bounce rate significantly.

ACTION STEP: Include internal links at the top of your article.

12 ☐ USE LSI KEYWORDS

LSI (Latent Semantic Indexing) keywords are words that are commonly found alongside your target keyword.

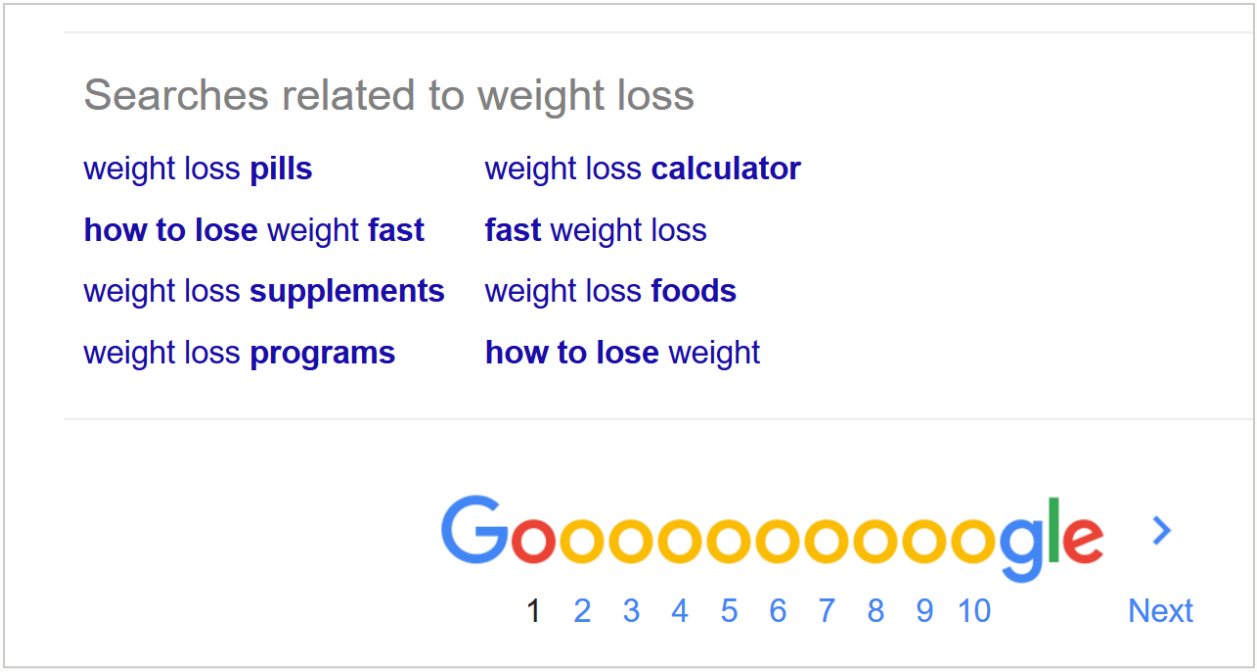
For example, if you were writing about "weight loss tips", then you'd probably mention words like "nutrition", "dieting", "fat loss" etc.

"Nutrition", "dieting", and "fat loss" are LSI keywords.

When Google sees those words around your target keyword, it gives them confidence that you're writing quality stuff.

Fortunately, it's easy to find LSI keywords for any keyword.

Just search for that keyword in Google and scroll to the bottom of the page where it says "searches related to…"



Those are all LSI keywords that you want to include in your article.

ACTION STEP: Include 1-2 LSI keywords in every article.

13 ☐ DWELL TIME

Like with bounce rate, Google pays very close attention to “short clicks” vs. “long clicks”, also known as dwell time. Dwell time simply measures how long a searcher stays on your page before hitting the back button.

If they hit their back button immediately after landing on your page, it’s a sign of a low quality page.

You can increase your average dwell time by writing long, engaging content that keeps people reading.

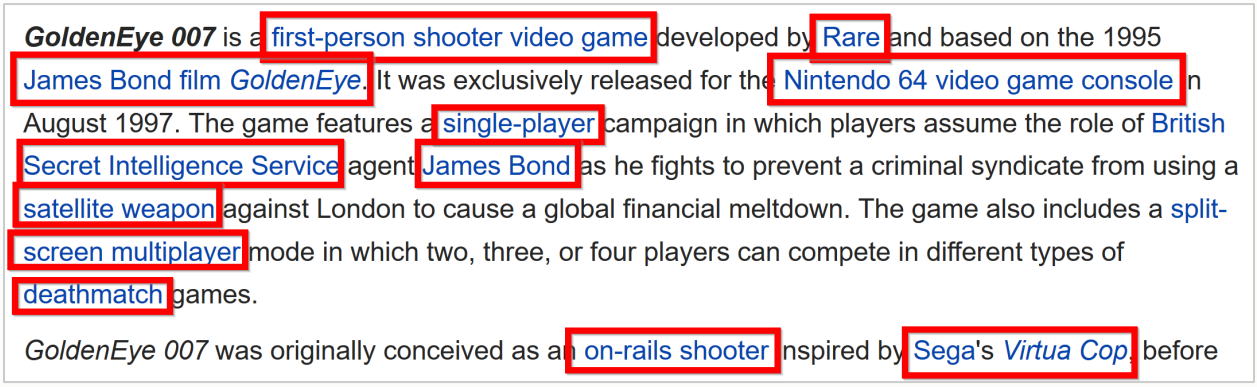
That way — even if they bounce back to the search results — you at least have a “long click”. That long click shows Google that you gave them something of value while they were there.

ACTION STEP: Write long, engaging content that keeps people reading. Put a lot of effort on making your first paragraph interesting and compelling.

14 ☐ INTERNAL LINKING

Internal linking is SO money. If you want to see a great example of how to internal link on your site, check out Wikipedia.

They add keyword-rich internal links to every entry:



GoldenEye 007 is a first-person shooter video game developed by Rare and based on the 1995 James Bond film *GoldenEye*. It was exclusively released for the Nintendo 64 video game console in August 1997. The game features a single-player campaign in which players assume the role of British Secret Intelligence Service agent James Bond as he fights to prevent a criminal syndicate from using a satellite weapon against London to cause a global financial meltdown. The game also includes a split-screen multiplayer mode in which two, three, or four players can compete in different types of deathmatch games.

GoldenEye 007 was originally conceived as an on-rails shooter inspired by Sega's *Virtua Cop*, before

ACTION STEP: Add 2-3 internal links to older articles when you publish a new one.

15 ☐ H2 AND H3 TAGS

I don’t think H2 and H3 tags are a big deal. But you should include your target keyword at least once in an H2 or H3 subheading. This also has the added bonus of making your content easier to read.

ACTION STEP: Include your keyword once in an H2 or H3 subheading.

16 ☐ IMAGE OPTIMIZATION

This isn't absolutely necessary, but optimizing your images for popular keywords can land you traffic from Google Image Search.

ACTION STEP: Tag your images with keyword-rich alt text.

☐ BONUS STRATEGY #1: OPTIMIZE CLICKS TO CONTENT

For 90% of the sites on the web, your homepage is the more authoritative page on your site…

…which means it has the most PageRank to pass around to other pages.

In other words:

The closer a page is to your homepage, the higher it will rank in Google.

So you want to reduce the number of "clicks" from your homepage to pages that you're trying to rank.

If it takes more than 3 clicks to get from your homepage to your target page (ie. Homepage-->blog-->older posts-->fitness category-->blog post), then that page is missing out on a lot of critical PageRank.

At Backlinko, I include links to important pages in my homepage sidebar.

That way, when I get a link to my homepage, some of that PageRank flows directly to those important pages.

ACTION STEP: Make sure high-priority pages are no more than 3 clicks away from your homepage.

☐ BONUS STRATEGY #2: MAXIMIZE CTR

If people rarely click on your page in Google's search results, it sends a VERY strong signal to Google that you're not a good fit for that keyword.

And the opposite is also true: if people's cursors are attracted to your site like a magnet, Google will give you a rankings boost.

How can you maximize your CTR in Google?

That's easy: look at that keyword's Adwords ads.

You see, the Adwords ads that you see for competitive keywords are the result of hundreds (if not thousands) of split tests. Split tests to maximize clicks.

And you can use elements of that ad to turn your title and description tags into click magnets.

For example, let's say you were going to publish a blog post optimized around the keyword "glass water bottles".

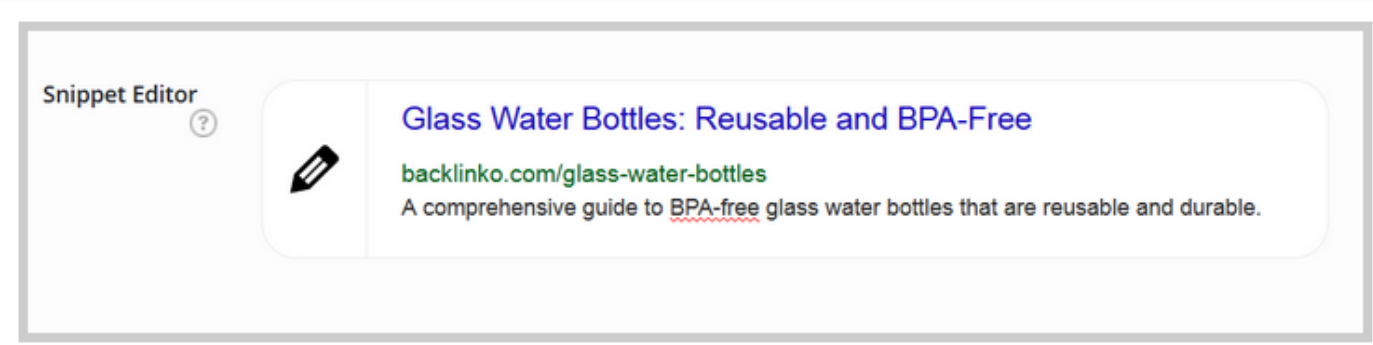
First, take a look at the Adwords ads for that keyword.

Keep an eye out for interesting copy from the ads that you can work into your title and description.

In our "glass water bottles" example, we have phrases like:

- BPA-free
- With straws
- Drink like a boss
- USA made
- Reusable

Here's how the title and description tags might look:


Snippet Editor
Glass Water Bottles: Reusable and BPA-Free
backlinko.com/glass-water-bottles
A comprehensive guide to BPA-free glass water bottles that are reusable and durable.

As you can see, these tags include words that are **proven** to generate clicks.

For more information on boosting your organic CTR, [check out this video.]